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3 November 1966

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet ICBM Strengths and Capabilities.

The Soviets retain their belief in the primacy of strategic attack and defense forces to deter the US and to support their foreign policy. Soviet strategic attack forces will continue to include a variety of weapon systems, with chief emphasis upon ICBMs. The Soviets are building forces which we believe will give them, in the next year or two, greatly increased confidence that they have a retaliatory capability sufficient to assure the destruction of a significant portion of US industrial resources and population. They will probably also seek, through both strategic attack and defense programs, to improve their ability to reduce the damage the US can inflict on the USSR should deterrence fail and war in fact occur. We do not believe, however, that the Soviets will expect to achieve by the mid-1970's strategic capabilities which would make rational the deliberate initiation of general war.

The Soviets now have some 300-350 operational ICBM launchers. We estimate that the USSR will have some 650-800 operational launchers in mid-1968. This is considerably more than we earlier thought they

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would have by that time and reflects our belief that construction of launchers has been started at a higher rate than ever before.

The Soviets might not find it advantageous to build ICBM forces much larger than those we estimate for 1968. On the other hand, they might consider their deterrent to be significantly more convincing and their military power improved if they can acquire an ICBM force about as large as the published size of the US force. We therefore estimate a Soviet ICBM force of some 800-1,100 operational launchers in mid-1971 and some 800-1,200 in mid-1976.

A 1976 force of about 1,200 launchers would probably consist primarily of small, less expensive ICBMs. A force of 800 or so would probably incorporate greater qualitative improvements and significant numbers of larger ICBMs. Characteristic of future deployment will be hard silos and possibly mobile launchers. Qualitative improvements will probably include much better accuracies and may include sophisticated reentry vehicles and penetration aids. The development of the force will probably be marked by interruptions and leveling-off phases as new, more effective systems are introduced and older systems are phased out.

We think that ICBM forces falling anywhere within these estimated ranges could be considered as meeting a broad Soviet criterion for a credible deterrent. Thus we intend our estimate of future force levels as a range of uncertainty, either side of which would reflect

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the same basic Soviet strategic concept. For a period so far ahead,  
however, much will depend on the interplay between US and Soviet  
decisions taken in the interim.

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